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A New Period of Fine Printing in France

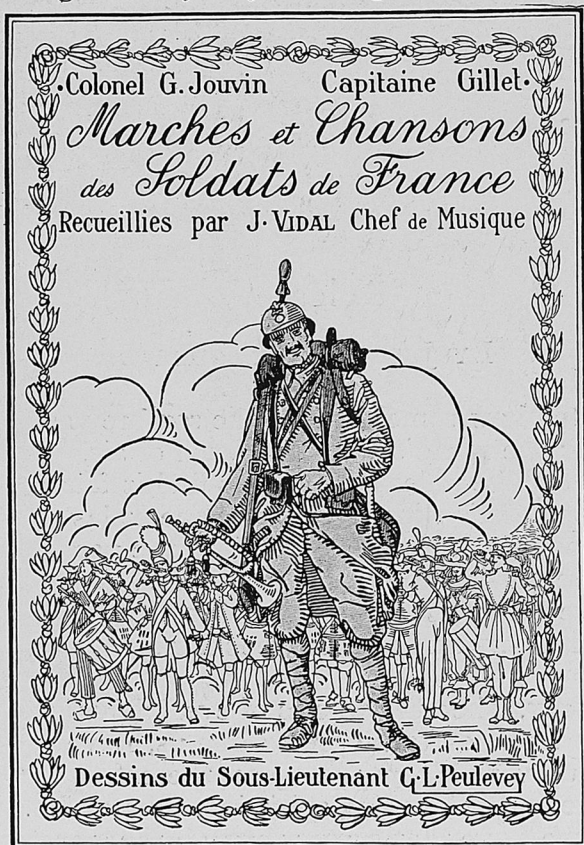
BY GEORGES LECOMTE, PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIÉTÉ DES GENS DE LETTRES

DURING the four and a half years of this exhausting war, notwithstanding the fact that all Frenchmen of 18 to 50 years of age were in arms, and that all the efforts of the country were directed toward the struggle for victory, the artists and the manufacturers of books did not remain inactive. With labor very scarce and an unfortunate insufficiency of raw materials, and, besides, with little encouragement from public opinion, which was too harassed by the vicissitudes of war to be deeply interested in the fastidious occupations of peace-time, patiently, under the most praiseworthy conditions, they carried on an evolution interesting in every way, and which, for several years before the war, was beginning to take shape. Three exhibitions devoted to the Decorative Arts Section of our living and vital Salon d'Automne, home of the most modern art, had given an opportunity for seeing the very latest stages of the *Librairie française*, even to those distracted lovers of books who were too occupied or too hurried to have the time to follow day by day the works and researches of the various publishers. Moreover, in the very heat of the struggle, in

1916, a very delightful exhibition of the illustrated French book of the war was organized with good taste and judgment at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, that great French storehouse which should be known and made known—Palais du Louvre, Pavillon de Marsan, 107 rue de Rivoli; it presented us with a most interesting collection.

It was clearly manifested then, that France, country of beautiful books, well-made, harmoniously paged and embellished, was again becoming more and more faithful to the great traditions of its past, while taking care, more than ever, to produce modern work, in accord with the thought and customs of today.

At last, in the month of May, 1918 while the bombs from the Gothas and the shells from the monstrous Boche gun were raining upon Paris, once more threatened as in 1914, by a terrible German offensive, the Musée Galliera (the Musée d'Art Décoratif of the City of Paris, 10 Avenue Pierre Ier de Serbie) opened its doors to a very important and magnificent exposition, much more general, of the modern French book, where there were found assembled the most beautiful books of the past twenty years, an



TITLE PAGE OF MARCHES ET CHANSONS DES SOLDATS DE FRANCE. DECORATIONS DRAWN BY G. L. PEULEVEY



PAGE FROM "MARCHES ET CHANSONS DES SOLDATS DE FRANCE." WITH DECORATIONS DRAWN BY G. A. PEULEVEY

of November, when it was closed coincidentally with the apotheosis of Victory. By its brilliant success, the Municipal Council of Paris and the members of the jury of the Musée Galliera were rewarded for the patriotic courage and faith with which they carried out the plan, in the face of all difficulties, in an atmosphere so perilous and disturbed. Upon the occasions of my own visits to the Exhibition of the Musée Galliera, I often met American officers and soldiers there. It gives me pleasure to think that, among your soldiers on leave and spending a few days in Paris, there were many who were led there by the knowledge of it or guided thence by a happy chance and could see that fine exhibit of French production. At the Pavillon de Marsan, as at the Musée Galliera, amateurs and professionals, artisans and people of taste, were able to appreciate all the recent efforts of our art in the realm of books,



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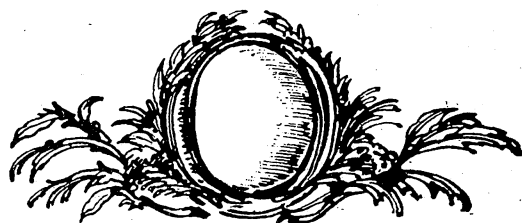
incomparable selection of our most elegant and most sumptuous art bindings, the particularly fine work of our best engravers on wood and of our best copper-plate engravers, the most harmonious and faithful productions of our photogravure art and, in addition, a few of the charming *travaux de ville*, cards of invitation, announcements, luxurious commercial catalogues, calendars, and *souvenirs patriotiques* of our most renowned art printers.

In spite of the murderous bombardments of those agonizing months and the daily destruction and damage which the "Big Berthas" wrought on Paris, this exhibition, to which the most celebrated collectors had been pleased to lend their treasures (notably, Mr. Louis Barthou, former President of the Conseil des Ministres who is passionately fond of books, learned, and of excellent taste), was much frequented up to the month

and to note its tendencies and its research. They were also able to realize that, for a long time, it has been so boldly and happily inventive, while remaining in line with our typographical traditions.

If I question myself as to the most striking feature of the efforts of the past few years in the realm of books, I think I may say that I am impressed, above all, by the conspicuous care in the design and the making of the book itself. Only recently, in France—and this has been in variance with the precedents that have come down to us of our finest epochs of French book production, there has been much more concern for the illustration and the binding of books than for what might be termed their actual mechanical make-up, which should be in harmony and be pleasing to the eye, as well as satisfying to the mind. How many times, in the last years of the Nineteenth century, have we seen expensive and very rare books de luxe, the covers and title pages of which were poorly devised, while the format was ill-suited and not in accord with style which the literary contents suggested, and which books, illogically constructed, were handled with difficulty. The illustrations might have been expressive and delightful, and the pages might have been embellished with care. Having given more importance to the illustrations of the book than to its architecture (as one might call it) and, furthermore, having clothed his fine book with a choice binding, the booklover sat back comfortably in his library and had the illusion of possessing a handsome volume—whereas, in reality, in most cases he had merely an expensive and rare book, a volume containing only certain elements of beauty, and, even then, not the essential but the incidental elements, the ones with which, in the last analysis, a beautiful book could dispense.

It must, of course, be admitted that, notwithstanding these all too frequent errors in the *éditions de luxe*, of a few years ago, in all periods in France there have been books planned with taste,



CE RECUEIL

QUI RAPPELLE LES LUTTES SÉCULAIRES
OÙ TROIS PEUPLES SE SONT CHERCHÉS
POUR S'UNIR DANS LE MÊME PRINCIPE
EST DÉDIÉ

À LA VIEILLE ANGLETERRE
MÈRE DE TOUTES LES DÉMOCRATIES
DEBOUT LA PREMIÈRE
POUR LA DÉFENSE

DU DROIT



DEDICATION PAGE FROM "FRANCE AMÉRIQUE."
DECORATIONS BY BERNARD NAUDIN. PUBLISHED BY
R. HELLEU, PARIS

where the essential qualities have not been sacrificed to the points of secondary importance and where the fantastic has not dominated at the cost of logic or sane balance. It is especially within the last ten years that publishers, artists and certain experts in the decoration of the book, have come to give their first concern to its actual building, to the happy arrangement of the text, to suitable margins, to the choice of type intelligently adapted to the format of the book and to the fitness of all these things to a book, particular literary character. What

is the significance of a cover, a title, or a printed page? Like the façade of a house, it is simple and harmonious balance between planes and openings, between white and black, as it were. It consists of a judicious employment of materials appropriate to the surface of its edifice and to the purpose for which it is designed. The embellishment, which should be planned simultaneously with the conception of the work as a whole, should always be kept subordinate to it. Before one has read a page of text or examined the details of the vignette or of the *cul-de-lampe* with which it is decorated, the book should present harmony to the eye and satisfy the mind. One should have an impression of completeness and of balance, of order and clearness, and, above all, of harmony. It is this last point, in truth so essential, which

seems to concern many publishers the least. In even the most expensive volumes how often the covers and the title-pages are not in accord, the character of the type conspicuously incongruous; how often, in the solid pages, the margins are out of proportion to the mass of text, where the black and the white are badly distributed.

Without neglecting the embellishment, which they select to be as typical as possible and as harmoniously adapted to the character of type, the most modern of our book experts, whose works were admired at the two exhibitions referred to at the beginning of this article, hold the construction of the book to be of fundamental importance. They set to work to get this result, by using a clear and richly toned paper—*amoureux de l'encre*, as it is called in printers' language



sacrés de l'homme, afin que cette Déclaration, constamment présente à tous les membres du corps social, leur rappelle sans cesse leurs droits & leurs devoirs; afin que les actes du pouvoir législatif & ceux du pouvoir exécutif, pouvant être à chaque instant comparés avec le but de toute institution politique, en soient plus respectés; afin que les réclamations des citoyens, fondées désormais sur des principes simples & incontestables, tournent toujours au maintien de la constitution & au bonheur de tous.

En conséquence, l'Assemblée Nationale reconnaît & déclare, en présence & sous les auspices de l'Être Suprême, les droits suivants de l'homme & du citoyen :

Article 1^{er}. LES HOMMES NAISSENT ET DEMEURENT LIBRES ET ÉGAUX EN DROITS; LES DISTINCTIONS SOCIALES NE PEUVENT ÊTRE FONDÉES QUE SUR L'UTILITÉ COMMUNE.

Article. 2. LE BUT DE TOUTE ASSOCIATION POLITIQUE EST LA CONSERVATION DES DROITS NATURELS ET IMPRESCRIPTIBLES DE L'HOMME; CES DROITS SONT LA LIBERTÉ, LA PROPRIÉTÉ, LA SÛRETÉ ET LA RÉSISTANCE À L'OPPRESSION.

Article 3. LE PRINCIPE DE TOUTE SOUVERAI-



OF ALL SOVEREIGNTY; NOR SHALL ANY BODY OF MEN OR ANY INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE AUTHORITY WHICH IS NOT EXPRESSLY DERIVED FROM IT.

Article 4. LIBERTY CONSISTS IN THE POWER OF DOING WHATEVER DOES NOT INJURE ANOTHER. ACCORDINGLY THE EXERCISE OF THE NATURAL RIGHTS OF EVERY MAN HAS NO OTHER LIMITS THAN THOSE WHICH ARE NECESSARY TO SECURE TO EVERY OTHER MAN THE FREE EXERCISE OF THE SAME RIGHTS, AND THESE LIMITS ARE DETERMINABLE ONLY BY THE LAW.

Article 5. THE LAW OUGHT TO PROHIBIT ONLY ACTIONS HURTFUL TO SOCIETY. WHAT IS NOT PROHIBITED BY THE LAW SHOULD NOT BE HINDERED; NOR SHOULD ANY ONE BE COMPELLED TO THAT WHICH THE LAW DOES NOT REQUIRE.

Article 6. THE LAW IS AN EXPRESSION OF THE COMMON WILL. ALL CITIZENS HAVE A RIGHT TO CONCUR, EITHER PERSONALLY OR BY THEIR REPRESENTATION, IN ITS FORMATION. IT SHOULD BE THE SAME ORF ALL, WHETHER IT PROTECTS OR PUNISHES; AND ALL BEING EQUAL IN ITS SIGHT, ARE EQUALLY ELIGIBLE TO ALL HONORS, PLACES, AND EMPLOYMENTS, ACCORDING TO THEIR DIFFERENT ABILITIES, WITHOUT ANY OTHER DISTINCTION THAN THAT OF THEIR VIRTUES AND TALENTS.

—and by using bold type-faces, not worn by too long usage. They select a comfortable and practical shape, for easy handling. They use taste in devising a symmetrical page arrangement, to please the eye, in harmony with the height and breadth of the text, giving a value to the type-character, so that the distribution of black and white may, in itself, be the first step in artistic effect. At the Pavillon de Marsan, as well as at the Musée Galliera, and, since then, at numerous art bookshops, how many have been the beautiful volumes, well-planned and admirable in themselves, on account of their perfect harmony and quality of printing, without any ingenious or significant embellishment to enhance their beauty by a complementary charm! It is only when they are incorporated so as truly to form an integral part of the book, that the illustrations, page headings, vignettes, etc., add to the beauty of the volume. The good decorators of the modern French book do not adorn a text with drawings and sketches thrown in at random or inartistically running into the margins. Then, too, they refrain from having illustrations out of proportion to the printed space, or too black, or too gray, for the type which they must heighten in effect; and, when they plan a decoration in several colors, they see to it that it does not over-balance the text and assume an excessive and predominating importance. However ingenious or delicate it may be, a decoration ceases to be appropriate for the book, when it ceases to be an accessory, har-



PAGE FROM "FRANCE AMÉRIQUE." PUBLISHED BY R. HELLEU, PARIS

moniously subordinate, or when it becomes a hindrance to the reader of the text.

The artists and publishers, while doing modern work, revive, with so much taste, the best traditions of French books; they are in no danger of falling into the error which was rather frequent in certain books de luxe of the last ten or twenty years of the Nineteenth century,—printed the text over an illustration in colors. No matter how faint its tones might be, this made the reading of the text uncomfortable and

disagreeable, while the type characters spoil the grace of the lines and colors of the decoration, and prevented one from enjoying its charm or its dignity.

In the well-planned books of the present day, one does not have the unhappy surprise of finding type characters too condensed or too small in proportion to the width of the page, which makes it illegible, nor too large and too heavy for a narrow page. Strict adherence to these principles and laws, which may not be discarded with impunity, does not preclude certain ventures of fantasy and bold innovation, prompted by good taste. The harmonious originality of an ornament is the more pleasing when it does not upset the balance of a page. Moreover, the proportion of ink and space, the clever display of paragraphs, the happy relation between the margins and the printing, give an opportunity to book artisans to display their taste, knowledge, and inventive genius. More carefully than did their predecessors of the last century, they study the beauty of the

type character, its bold and simple form. They realize that is the essential factor which nothing else can supplement.

All the artists and the lovers of books ever regret the death of the four brothers Peignot, typefounders, inventors, happy and zealous men, who, all four of them, gave their lives for France. Just as keen in their patriotism as in their profession, they took up arms as volunteers to conquer the barbarians. Alas, they all four died, in full youth, at the height of their creative power, after having given us the dignified Grasset style of type; and the Auriol, which is so modern and graceful; the charming vignettes of Bellery-Desfontaines (that artist who was also taken from us too soon); and the Cochin typeface, which is the essence of the harmonious and clear elegance of the Eighteenth century. These men were great figures of French industry and their premature disappearance is a grievous loss in the realm of printing as an art. Another sad blow during the war was the death of Eugène Grasset, the master decorator, who was learned and imbued with artistic sense, and to whom we owe, in addition to the type and the vignettes which bear his name, uniquely precious volumes and quantities of books, music scores, etc. The bookloving world also mourns the loss of the celebrated wood-engraver, Auguste Lepère, to whom we are indebted for some of our beautiful books and who, in the matter of art editions, exercised the best influence. Happily, we still have a brilliant and compact battalion of inventive artists, of careful artisans of excellent taste; of publishers who make a virtue of issuing beautiful works. At the Musée des Arts Decoratifs and at the Musée Galliera, we have had an opportunity to appreciate the results of their combined efforts; and these men continue to give us really precious works.

In the course of such a brief survey, one cannot pretend to enumerate all of the books of original beauty which are worthy of being known and of having a place in the library of the most exacting book

collectors. We may, however, be permitted to cite a few of the most recent volumes which exemplify this care for the substantial building of the book, the harmonious and well-balanced page arrangement and the embellishment which always remains adapted to printing type, which showed fresh, distinctive and boldly in its shading. In the delightful *Fioretti* and *Eloa*, of the great book-illustrator, Maurice Denis, no one could fail to appreciate the harmony of the tones and the perfect suitability of the colored wood-engravings to the text. The *Don Quichotte*, of Daniel Vierge, gives us another pleasing example of a beautiful typographical composition illustrated with etchings of wonderful dignity and very interesting heliogravures. The *Livre de la Jungle*, engraved on wood by the animalist Jouve and printed by Schmied, has its text attractively arranged and its charm is increased by very interesting drawings—some, perhaps, with a little too much color. For *L'Homme qui a perdu son ombre*, the master designer, Bernard Naudin, has illustrated with remarkable etchings a text arranged with taste. In this book, which was published by André Peignot (who later voluntarily sacrificed his life for France) there appear all of the quantities of which Bernard Naudin later gave proof in the decoration of the *Bulletin des Armées* and in the posters for war-loans and civil ceremonies. *La Vie des Abeilles*, which was done at the publishing house of Féroud, by Giraldon, and illustrated by him with colored woodcuts, adds a dainty volume to the list of precious works which we owe to this great artist in books and designer of very pleasing letterpress work which bears his name. The publisher, Léon Pichon, one of those who is making the greatest efforts and who promises us a future of charming creations, has given us, in late years, *La Religieuse portugaise*, then *Daphnis and Chloé*, of Carlegle, in which a sober decoration is allied to a perfect text. The *Saison en Enfer*, without a single illustration (also published by Léon Pichon) is a folio of attractive appearance.

In the same spirit of fairness, it is a pleasure to recall, among the interesting examples of the happy tendencies of the modern French book, all of the perfectly planned and printed books of the art the art publishing house of Pelletan-Helleu, whose illustrations combine originality with taste. *Les Marchés Normands*, of the late lamented Auguste Lepere; *Les Fleurs du Mal*, of Emile Bernard, a volume conspicuous for the reciprocal suitability of the printing and the woodcuts of Jérôme Coignard (Société des Cent Bibliophiles); and the *Jaloux Carizalis* (Société Littéraire de France), with woodcuts in a broad spirit by Jou; the three years of *Les Modes et Manières d'aujourd'hui*, published by the romancer and poet, Pierre Corrad, in collaboration with the exquisite designers, Lepape, Martin, and Barbier; the interesting collection of the *Nouvel Imagier*; the charming little livres de piété of Louis Rouart; the choice editions of Conquet, Meyniel, etc.

Lastly, after considering important books, one should leave unnoticed the artistic invitation cards, programmes, menus, calendars, and the artistic catalogues for our high-class trades, souvenir pamphlets and cards, which are designed with such ingenious taste, by magicians in the world of printing, like Draeger Brothers, or by that most interesting young publisher, M. Coquemer, to whom we owe a remarkable collection of illustrated impressions of the war. In all the golden periods of the art of printing, works of this sort follow the influence of the characteristics which are dominant in books, and they show the same tendencies. Moreover, we consider it an excellent sign that this taste and desire

for harmony, balance, and unity, appear in certain popular works as well as in the important works.

Another good influence exerted by these new contemporaneous French books is the very praiseworthy effort, in so far as it is possible to give to cheap books the benefit of the advantages which books de luxe have. Indeed, it is not sufficient to give masterpieces of small editions to an élite. It is most important to spread among the masses volumes which are well made and well illustrated, and which, little by little, educate popular taste. The volume de luxe has not only an intrinsic value, but a greater importance because of the influence which it has on the production of more simple works.

It is noteworthy that, in France, there have never been more publishing houses intelligently conducted by men of merit, with the collaboration of clever artists, such as Henri de Waroquier, Robert Bonfils, Van Bever, etc. Such publishers make an effort to turn out ordinary books, sold at reasonable prices, and the making and embellishing of which suggest the care which is used in making books de luxe. Apart from the well known old publishing houses, who are bringing credit to themselves through their eager efforts to rejuvenate their work, it suffices to mention the editions of the Publishers Cres, those of the nouvelle Revue française, of Emile-Paul, of Floury, etc. Those well inspired and well received products are very successful, and they compel the indifferent publishers to improve their volumes.

May this hasty review give to our American friends the conviction that a splendid epoch is dawning again upon the making of French books.

A Winter Sunset

BY DOROTHY STOCKBRIDGE

I wonder if those calm dim sunset skies
Are not the reflex of some paradise;
That great white feath'ry cloud, an angel's wing;
That breathless hush, an angel listening.